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ABSTRACT

Policy making, policy implementation, and accountability are discussed, and a conceptual model is proposed for understanding a number of contemporary problems and for planning future research. The model suggests a tension theory consisting of two dilemmas. One is an apparent conflict between the public's expectation of educational self-determination and the professional's desire for autonomy, and the other is caused by an apparent bureaucratic "elevation" of policy making which moves its points farther and farther away from clients. Accountability and evaluation are examined in terms of superordinate/subordinate relationships in school organizations and in terms of external influence. (Author)

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GOVERNANCE, ACCOUNTABILITY AND EVALUATION IN EDUCATION - EXAMINED IN THE CONTEXT OF A TENSION MODEL

by

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A. A Point of View

The object of this paper is to examine governance accountability and evaluation in education in the context of a tension model. My interest is not to report on research but propose a point-of-view, a conceptual model for viewing the issues related to the topic and to suggest several future lines of inquiry that would, in my opinion, be most fruitful.

To begin, I would propose that school governance is founded in two apparent conflicts in American public education. One is the struggle between the public's right to educational self-determination and the professional's need (and/or desire) for a wide range of decision prerogatives.[1] Historically, this can be seen as a decrease in public influence on a progressively wider range of issues and an increase in professionalization. Prior to this century, most aspects of schooling were controlled by the public, primarily through local boards or committees. Influenced by ward politics, schools were an integral part of the fabric of political patronage.[2]

Beginning in the 1890's, the reform era insisted on professional autonomy to rid the schools of politics. Education was reshaped as the reformers embraced scientific management of schools and enhanced the stature of educational administrators through technical training. The advent of tenure not only protected teachers from unfair treatment by the public and school board but also added to professional immunity.[3] The growth in size and complexity of school systems increased the dependence of the public's elected representative, the school board, on professionals. The growth of professional organization and unions furthered efforts to increase the professional's immunity and autonomy. Therefore, one persistent issue has been between those who maintain that professionals are not sufficiently responsive to the desires of the public and usually advocate more community control and those who maintain that professionals <u>need</u> wide decision-making latitude to carry out effectively the complex job of teaching. This conflict is at the heart of the problem of governance in American education.

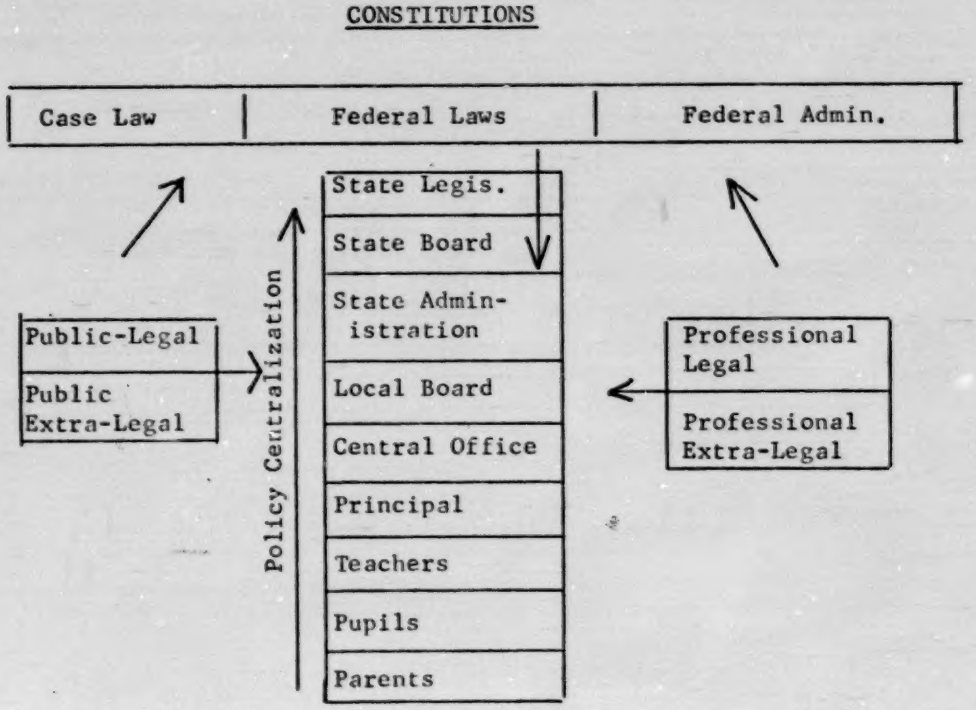
The second major struggle is between the consumers desire to influence educational products and increased centralization of policy-making that has made consumer efforts to influence policy virtually impossible. Three factors have augmented this trend. One has been the general philosophy that schools are a "melting pot", aimed at Americanizing youngsters.[4] As a consequence, education has followed the path of seeking an ideal schooling for all. This has resulted in an apparent "sameness" of American schools. Second, population growth and shifts as well as the scientific management philosophy brought about belief in economy of scale and the consequent consolidation of schools and school districts.[5] A third factor has been increasing state and federal intervention into schools to improve the quality of schooling and to use schools as instruments to solve national problems. State minimum program funds, curriculum, and teacher certification laws were passed in the 1920's and 1930's, all aimed at improving the quality of local schools. Since sputnik, numerous federal mandates have introduced requirements and inducements to schools related to national defense and more recently to social reform. Currently, the old melting pot philosophy has declined and many advocate a newer cultural pluralism accompanied by increased local control of schools.

At another level of discourse, these struggles illustrate two competing views about the relationship between the political order and the educational system. The older view emphasized that education is an independent variable. The political order was determined by the socialization of youngsters through education. Hence, the need for public schools. The newer view rests on the assumption that the political order is the independent variable and education the dependent variable. The political order permits the schools wide latitude in the outcomes the schools seek in their interactions with children.[6]

Regardless of the relative merits of these points of view, the historical record is one of a series of growing gaps between who makes policy and those who are affected by the policy-making. Interwoven with these gaps is the continuous struggle over education's formative or dependent status in society.

A few definitions and a proposed heuristic scheme may further illustrate and clarify this issue. The scheme proposes that each position in both the general social order and in the specific formal organization responsible for public schooling has a "constitution" consisting of a complex of norms (written and unwritten) about rights and responsibilities.[7] Positions include all formal actors from state legislatures to local school boards to pupils and their parents as well as actors external to the formal structure. Some external actors, such as the Courts, have legal rights and responsibilities; others, such as teacher unions, have legal authority accrued through negotiation; while still others exert informal influence.

In diagram the situation can be viewed in part as follows:



Each constitution has two dimensions. One is governance, whereby each incumbent either individually or collectively has a complex of rights or prerogatives to make decisions that effect either his own office and role or those of incumbents in other offices and roles.

The constitutions do not present a neat hierarchical pattern. While a teacher has a degree of authority over his activities and those of his students, other agencies, such as the courts, may also claim jurisdictional prerogatives.

The second dimension is accountability and consists of those obligations and responsibilities either to perform tasks or accomplish objectives. A position is accountable to one or more other positions as well as for outputs.

Accountability can thus be examined in the larger framework of public policy implementation. Many policy decisions are symbolic responses to public demands and professional prerogatives. Accountability models can be viewed as symbolic or material response mechanisms, measured by tangible outputs or in terms of what they represent. Therefore, accountability will be viewed from two vantage points -- one concerned with substantive and technical problems, the other concerned with the political significance of accountability discussions.

If accountability models are viewed as specific technological inventions, they can be used as instruments to understand the broader process of how a complex organization can be changed. This concern reflects interest in improved models and technological developments, including measures, for accountability. From the political side, accountability needs to be studied with questions about which educational subsystems are advantaged or disadvantaged by accountability decisions. More subtle, and significant, differences exist concerning definitions and rationales of accountability held by different actors in the governance system. The distinction between technical and political

accountability sensitizes research efforts to differences among accountability efforts from groups such as parents, legislators or educational experts.

The constitutional system works effectively when the positions legitimately contest for prerogatives and responsibilities. Perennially, struggles exist over centralization versus decentralization, autonomy versus dependence, and size and efficiency versus intimacy and effect. Each position seeks to define its own prerogatives and responsibilities but is forced into healthy conflicts and compromises with other positions. In this rich diversity, creativity and potential are key developmental concepts.[8] Today many would content that this healthy state of tension has been upset. In its place is an unhealthy, illegitimate struggle in which usual rights and prerogatives are attacked with normative approval for violation of law and regulations. Illegitimate acts of violence and power are symptoms of this unhealthy and dysfunctional conflict.

B. Research Objectives

The constitutional tensions described above have produced a number of symptoms and pressures for change in education. The union movement has sought to modify the governance dimension of teacher constitution by increasing the range of teacher prerogatives. Seeing their prerogatives threatened, principals' organizations have increasingly taken a posture of negotiations with school boards. The community control movement can be viewed as a sympton of the apparent unresponsiveness of a large bureaucracy to the expectation of parents. The alternative school movement is evidence of this spillover from "constitutional tensions". The public schools, viewed as an unhealthy system unable to manage conflict and tension, lack the capacity to adjust and spawn a new generation of schools.

The prevalence of new teacher certification bills stressing licensure based on measured performance rather than training, and other accountability legislation exemplify states responding to public expectations by modifying their "constitutions", i.e., state laws. The decrease in the average tenure of school superintendents who try to function as mediators of the tensions in addition to the ease with which the objectives of a policy can be distorted by the bureaucracy in its implementation are poorly understood, but common phenomena.

The R & D efforts to deal with these problems should aim at increasing an understanding of and improving the effectiveness of school governance and accountability by eliminating illegitimate conflict patterns and improving the content and process of legitimate conflict and tension reduction.[9] A major task will be to diagnose and define relevant problems and to establish program objectives. Most important will be the designing of one or more conceptual frameworks on which to base a long-range R & D effort.

Definition of the governance and accountability problems will be no minor task. At this time, four alternatives are proposed which require considerable scrutiny. In their defense, these statements are overly simplified and the alternatives are not mutually exclusive.

1. One contention is that the public's (clients') point of impact on school policy issues is too remote from the classroom and that the schools are not sufficiently responsive to legitimate client expectation; that schools would be "better" if more governance decisions could be made on the local district or on the local school level and if formal (legal) procedures prevailed that afforded parent's direct influence on the local schools.

2. A second alternative is to maintain that policies made by legislatures and school boards are responsive to client expectations but do not get implemented because of bureaucratic or professional resistance. If this gap is better understood, it can be minimized. Such a view presupposes that all policy resistance is bad. It is possible that such resistance to lay policy is neither bad nor self-serving but necessary for professionals to reach their legitimate educational objectives.

3. A third way to view the problem is to observe the public's sense of estrangement from school policy decisions and the prevalence of conflict between interested parties (school boards, teacher organizations, parents, students, so forth). Such conflict is exacerbated by the absence of any rationale for who should make decisions about what issues much less an agreement over who should make what kinds of decisions. Such a view would suggest a mapping and sorting of different types of decisions, with subsequent assignment of sets of decisions prerogatives to various participants.

4. A fourth view examines the accountability issue. Its current prominence stems largely from the tension between public rights and professional prerogatives. Because this tension has grown increasingly hazy, and increasingly politicized, inappropriate modes of analysis are used frequently. One view of accountability maintains that the prevailing accountability model in public schools in an industrial model minus any outcome measures. Supervision, rules, regulations and other constraints which circumscribe

the range of optional teacher behaviors inhibit the creativity needed by teachers to contend effectively with a wide range of pupil variations. In short, schools are organized in a way that prevents teachers from being effective.

An alternative accountability model is currently receiving considerable attention. It is one in which, at all points in the bureaucracy, the superior and subordinate agree on the objectives to be accomplished by the subordinate (supra-goals) and on what kinds of evidence will be acceptable for having adequately accomplished those objectives (accountability). Such a model may be effective if the extensive constraints that currently inhibit the flexibility of the professional are eliminated. Observations would indicate that the schools are trying to develop the second (goals and outcomes) model while continuing to maintain the first model (procedural rules and regulations). In combination, the organization is telling the professional not only that he must produce results but is also telling him how to perform his work - an intolerable combination. Equally, there are other accountability models that work (more or less) in other organizations and professions which may have value for schools. If, as much research in organizational behavior indicates, agreement over goals and knowledge of the results of individual efforts is a sine qua non of effectiveness, and if such a condition is absent in schools, then the creation and evaluation of various accountability models that contain that provision would be a valuable contribution to reform American education.

These current models ignore the constitutional issues of who has what prerogatives and responsibilities. Some device, such as a "constitutional convention", should provide more insightful discussion of such issues. Historically, earlier periods of American history have reflected agreement on supra-goals such as Americanization of students and also agreement about processes and methods for translating the public will into action.

The persistence of some governance and accountability issues suggests that certain research inquiries could be productively initiated or emphasized during the coming years and would relate to the following questions:

1. <u>What are the various constitution models that exist in education and what are the advantages and disadvantages of each?</u>

   What are the prerogatives and obligation of various governance and accountability models at the federal, state, and classroom level? What policy-making processes are used? The inquiry relates to process as well as authority and responsibility and suggests the description of "natural" models and their subsequent analysis and evaluation.

2. <u>Through what processes are parents involved in the education of their children? What are the effects, advantages, and disadvantages?</u>

   More specifically, what are the effects of parent involvement in local school and school system activities on their own children and on school policies?

3. What have been the effects of teacher negotiation during the past 20 years on the "constitutions" of teachers, administrators and school boards?

More specifically, have contractual arrangements resulting from negotiations increased bureaucratic behavior of school personnel in dealing with each other as well as pupils and parents?

4. What are the variables in the "constitutional system" (i.e. the bureaucracy and those actors that influence it) that facilitate and/or displace policy objectives during implementation?

More specifically, in what ways do the increasing divergence of policy-makers and mandated actors warp policy-making implementations?

In sum, the central problem is the rapid growth of dysfunctional conflicts in education characterized by the emphasis of conflicting parties upon their own rights and a deemphasis upon their obligations. This results in two forms of irresponsibility: an increased demand for autonomy without responsibility in educational organizations and a gap between policy making and operational activities in educational governance.

In governance, there are conflicting claims for legitimation of the rights of the public to more "responsive" schools and by the professionals for more "decision-making latitude." Simply, this conflict is highlighted by the struggle between the claims of centralized, large scale public and professional groups and those of decentralized (consumers and first line professionals) operating groups.

In accountability and evaluation the problems of internal organization conflict appear to stem from a lack of agreement upon the bases for coordination and interdependence and inter-organizational adjustments to the changing organizational environment and more important, lack of agreement over purpose.

The proximate causes can best be described by the concept of "progressive segregation of organizational units and influence subsystems." The tendency for units in organizations to drift apart into increased autonomy is well documented. This paper points to a growing balkanization in governance and the multiplication of semi-autonomous roles and turfs in organizations both suggesting centripetal forces are out-weighing centrifugal forces in American education today. "Suppressor effects," which usually limit the process of progressive segregation in organizations, either no longer exist or have been seriously weakened in American education.

The decline of "the old melting pot philosophy" and the rise of "a new cultural pluralism" draws a distinction between fundamental philosophic and value orientations of American society. Such an incomplete transaction on the fundamental issue of why public education exists is having a profound effect upon its governance and patterns of accountability.

Research that clarifies the purposes of education (schooling), particularly as translated into the obligations of the various participants, is badly needed. Until these things are more clear, the accountability and evaluation of education will remain on the level of political rhetoric.

FOOTNOTES

1. Thomas Eliot, "Toward an Understanding of Public School Politics," American Political Science Review. 53 (1959).

2. Raymond Callahan, Education and the Cult of Efficiency (1962).

3. ibid.

4. Daniel Moynihan and Nathan Glazer, Beyond the Melting Pot (1961).

5. Paul Mort, Public School Finance (1960).

6. Heinz Eulau, "Political Science and Education: The Long View and the Short", in Kirst, State, School and Politics (1972).

7. ibid.

8. Lawrence Iannaccone, "Increasing Irresponsibility in Education: A Growing Gap Between Policy Planning and Operational Groups," in Kirst (1972).